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Statement submitted by Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

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Statement

We are in 22 countries where we promote development in ways that respect the integrity of the earth. Our projects are geared towards poverty reduction, the promotion of peaceful coexistence among peoples of different faith and ideologies.

The transition to sustainable development goals will require a change in attitude within all sectors of society including our government leaders whose task is to elaborate bold, effective and people-friendly policies. The actual implementation of the sustainable development goals faces the problems of the pandemic of escalating violence that has young people drifting towards radical extremism and the effects of climate change.

Internal conflicts that result in protracted wars are fuelled by inequalities and the feeling of exclusion among members of a society. Wars displace people, alienate them from their communities and destroy infrastructures that support sustainable development. Unable to find jobs, young people lose hope and become targets of radical extremism. Others have material riches but their lives still lack meaning due to loss of a sense for spiritual values that nourish the soul while strengthening the capacity to resist what is not life giving. Joining and going to war with radical extremists seems to fill the void that young people feel. Besides destroying the integrity of the person, weapons manufacture inflicts harm upon the environment and exacerbates the effects of climate change.

Therefore focus must be placed on climate change as well as on young people whose voice needs to be heard. Listening to them will be the key to finding the causes of them drifting towards radical extremism. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all as indicated in goal 4 also need to include ways to help young people discover their deep spiritual values.

When placed at the centre, people experience a sense of belonging that helps them find meaning in life. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals states that "People are at the centre of sustainable development ...". This includes women, children, and youth and also people of all ages and from all walks of life who have not been given voice in the elaboration of policies that affect their lives. The cohesion that can come about with social inclusion will reward the efforts invested in the elaboration of the sustainable development goals. When people feel that they belong, they will assume the responsibility to make the post-2015 development agenda work. This requires openness, change of attitude and the willingness to risk so all will benefit.